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SUBJECT: MOROCCO READY FOR NEW ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN,  
AND AIMS HIGHER

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Morocco's Department of the Environment favors renewing discussions under the 2006 Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to create the next multi-year Environmental Plan of Action, and has also proposed exploring a separate bilateral Environmental Agreement, as envisioned under the FTA. Morocco's environmental programs align with USG development goals and agendas, and merit USG support. Post will coordinate with OES/ENV on further discussion of an Environmental Plan of Action. End summary.

Prior Environmental Cooperation Winding Down  
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¶2. (U) Under the procedures outlined in the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA) of 2006, the USG and GOM developed a Joint Statement on Environmental Cooperation, and signed in November 2006 a 2005-2007 Plan of Action Pursuant to the Joint Statement. Significant environmental cooperation under this plan included USAID Morocco grants, and MEPI-funded projects administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), among others. These projects have helped Morocco comply with the environmental provisions of the FTA, principally through capacity building among regulators and enforcement agencies in the GOM to manage and enforce environmental laws.

¶3. (SBU) In a January 27 meeting with EconOff and visiting Regional ESTH Hub Officer, Director for Partnership, Communication and Cooperation Mohamed Benyahia of the Moroccan Department of the Environment praised USAID and USEPA assistance, noting that it has provided the Department of Environment with needed capacities to enforce Morocco's portfolio of laws and regulations aimed at protecting the environment. He lamented the expiration of the 2005-2007 Plan of Action, and stated that the GOM would like to proceed on long-stalled discussions for a new Plan to continue that cooperation. However, he expanded, Morocco's longer term goal would be to negotiate with the United States a "global" Environmental Agreement, such as is envisioned under Section 17.3 of the FTA. Given the time it would take to conclude a new Agreement, Benyahia said the GOM proposes a two track approach to quickly develop a new Plan of Action, and concurrently begin negotiations for an over-arching Environmental Agreement.

Why an Environmental Agreement?  
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¶4. (SBU) Benyahia stated that the GOM would like to develop an Environmental Agreement that would structure U.S.-Morocco cooperation for long-term "investment" in environmental areas. The GOM already benefits from several agreements of this nature with European partners, he said, citing accords

with German development corporations GTZ and KFW. While the discrete projects under the past Plan of Action were important for strengthening Morocco's capabilities, now is the time for institutional support. The Department of Environment hopes for "investment programs to accompany Morocco's priority programs," Benyahia stated, including a desire to have USAID resume its support for environmental protection projects. He outlined Morocco's highest environmental priorities including:

-- Sanitation/wastewater management and reuse, both to protect the water quality and maximize Morocco's limited water resources;

-- Household waste management, including proper disposal, rehabilitation of uncontrolled dumps, and recycling; and

-- Air quality, with a two-part focus on air quality surveillance networks and national strategy to control emissions from fixed and mobile sources of pollution.

15. (SBU) EconOff and ESTHOff observed that USG commitments to long-term investments in an environmental program are uncommon, but undertook to convey the Department of Environment's ideas to Washington. We also agreed to report the GOM's interest in renewing discussions for a follow-on Environmental Plan of Action and explore the next steps.

#### GOM Seeks to Expand Regional Coordination

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16. (U) The GOM is also attempting to engage its neighbors in environmental cooperation and capacity building, reported

Department of Environment Chief of Enforcement and Litigation Fouad Zyadi. The Department of Environment is the chair of the three year old Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement in the Maghreb (NECEMA), a regional grouping of environmental agencies in North Africa. This network has held two conferences and several international training/experience sharing seminars, aimed at improving the North African states' capacities to regulate and enforce environmental laws. The Department of the Environment hopes to use the NECEMA forum to help the Maghreb countries harmonize their approach to environmental protection, both to further regional environmental protection and to improve the business environment for international partners who would have more comfort and familiarity in operating in different countries of the Maghreb, Zyadi stated.

Comment: What Next?

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17. (SBU) Comment: We hear not infrequently from ESTH interlocutors their wish that the U.S. sponsor long-term projects in a manner similar to some European environmental assistance. While Moroccan counterparts appreciate and praise past and current USG assistance, they unfortunately perceive our annual budgeting and project development process as less effective than European approaches to development projects. Although Post does not anticipate that a bilateral Environmental Agreement with U.S. funding for long-term environmental projects would be likely to materialize in the near future, we welcome Morocco's interest in prioritizing environmental and natural resource protection and management, and complying with its FTA environmental obligations. Post will coordinate with OES/ENV to determine our follow up on a new Environmental Plan of Action, focusing on areas of interest to USG global environment objectives and FTA support. We also continue to research additional options for strengthening our environmental cooperation, including Science Fellows or technical exchanges, while USAID is considering support for GOM implementation of policies relevant to wastewater management and reuse. Morocco's support of the NECEMA network and desire to position itself as a regional leader in this area provide an opportunity to leverage bilateral cooperation and capacity building for a wider regional audience. End Comment.

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